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SERMON.

PREACHED ON OCCASION

OF LAYING THE

FOUNDATION STONE

OF

A FREE-MASONS' HALL,

FOR THE USE

OF THE

SOUTH-SAXON LODGE,

IN

LEWES,

ON WEDNESDAY THE 19th DAY OF APRIL, 1797.

By JOSEPH FRANCIS FEARON, A.M.

PREBENDARY OF CHICHESTER, AND CHAPLAIN TO THE LORD BISHOP OF THE DIOCESE.

LEWES: PRINTED BY W. AND A. LEE.

AND SOLD BY F. AND C. RIVINGTON, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD, LONDON; BY
THE BOOKSELLERS AT CHICHESTER, BRIGHTON, CANTERBURY, MAID-
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TO

MAJOR-GENERAL HULSE,

PROVINCIAL GRAND MASTER FOR SUSSEX,

AND TO

THE MASTER, WARDENS, AND BRETHREN, OF THE
SOUTH-SAXON LODGE;

THIS SERMON,

IN GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE VERY DISTINGUISHED

MANNER WITH WHICH THE HONOURS OF MASONRY WERE

CONFERRED ON THE AUTHOR,

IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,

BY THEIR VERY FAITHFUL SERVANT,

AND BROTHER,

Joseph Francis Fearon.

ESTABLISHED JANUARY 1882

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NEW YORK

S E R M O N.

PROVERBS, Chap. ix. Verse 1.

WISDOM HATH BUILDED HER HOUSE, SHE HATH HEWN OUT HER SEVEN PILARS.

WHEN the Almighty decreed, by his powerful word, to create from Nothing, the World we now inhabit, he willed, that different orders and species of animals should exist upon, and people it. These were arranged according to their several powers, faculties, and pursuits. It cannot be supposed he would exert his Omnipotence in vain ; we may then be well assured he gave not life to any Being, without giving it means to support that life, and bestowing on it, in some sufficient manner, nourishment and protection. Could it enter into any Heart to conceive that the God of all, would form a class of living crea-

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tures,

tures, without thus providing for their maintenance and defence ; Reason must soon set aside the absurd suggestion : since such creatures, if mortal, would quickly perish, and the hand of God must be continually extended to call into life, that which would be useless to itself and others, without an object, and without a view, hasting to finish an existence of hapless birth, and registered in woe.

From this short argument we learn, this CANNOT be the mode in which an all-gracious Being, such as is the God of Nature, would act, and from experience we gather it is NOT so. We find no mouth without its appointed food, no animal so defenceless, as to be unprovided with some shield against its natural enemy.

From the Worm under our foot, to the Eagle which pierces the sky, one great chain of warfare and resistance reaches, of which no link can be broken, without disturbance of the whole, and destruction of a part. The Bird knows its enemy, whom it had never before seen, and endeavours by speed or address to avoid him. The Caterpillar has his appointed leaf ; remove him to another equally, perhaps to us more wholesome, and he dies, leaving it untouched. The Fish breathes in an element fatal to every other creature,

creature, while the other elements are destructive to him : but his blood is attempered to his situation, his form is suited to his wants.

Among, or rather at the head of those who thus inhabit the earth, is found the race of Mankind, differing in a most singular manner from all others. Without natural cloathing to protect it from inclement seasons, or weapons to defend itself ; without instinct to weave the nest, power to retreat under the earth, or seek its path in the waters ; defenceless at its birth beyond every other, this animal still lives, its race is continued, consequently it finds somewhere sustenance and protection. When arrived at maturity, it is called MAN, it commands every earthly creature. The fiercest beast encounters not willingly its power.---It procures arms from every element, by which those elements are subdued to its dominion.---It acts not from the implanted, limited, principle of instinct, but continues to improve in sagacity and force, and has hope to be admitted hereafter to the very presence of God. Why, it may be asked, is this creature endued with privileges so superior to others?---Because it is not meant, like them, merely to eat and drink, to continue its kind, and die. It is by Providence gifted with Reason, and with Immortality. It does not, like the other orders, return entirely

entirely to its dust, but is appointed to exist, when Time shall be no longer. Whether its lot be then happiness or misery, must depend on the manner in which Man hath conducted himself here. His first guide is Reason, and a sensation of right and wrong. But how shall the defenceless Infant ever arrive at years to be directed by his reason, or learn instruction from the experience of others?—The fostering hand of the Parent cherishes indeed its offspring, affectionate tenderness snatches it from destruction, teaches it what to seek, and what avoid, and protects it, till it can protect itself!---So also does every other creature:---None are seen to drive away their young, till they arrive at this stage. But here the parallel fails---THEY then neglect their progeny, as competent to support themselves. Not so the human race---They want instruction, they still need a Protector, and far from separating their interests from that of their Parents, they become daily more attached to them, gathering lessons of prudence and virtue from their lips.

Behold here the origin of Society---In Man only you will find it, because to the views and pursuits of Man only is it requisite. But when these natural attachments are broken, when we have seen the Grave closed on all who have protected our defenceless years,

are

S E R M O N.

we then to consider ourselves alone, regardless of others? Are we to buckle on the armour of universal war, and in the accents of Folly, proclaim the rights of Independence? No--- Other duties are yet unpaid---Society has still its claims upon us, which encrease rather than diminish every hour we breathe its salutary air.

As we have received favours, as we have benefited by the amiable attentions of others, no grateful, no humane, no honest spirit will fail to repay them, by doing to others, as others, when we had not voice to ask, or sense to acknowledge it, have done to us.

---How can we then enough extol the blessings of connubial love, by which

“ Relations dear, and all the Charities

“ Of Father, Son, and Brother, first were known.”*

At the mercy of the world, there needed not its opposition to destroy us---its neglect, its inattention might have left us to perish in a day : --- The benevolence which saved us calls for return, and ought not to call in vain.---The plea cannot be admitted, that we have no near kindred who want assistance, or have a right to look for comfort at our hands---that the eyes which anxiously watched

* MILTON.

our infant steps are closed in Death, and the Tongue that taught us Virtue, is silent. We must imitate the blessed Jesus, and whenever we meet with Indigence and Distress, consider those so afflicted, as our Brethren, and Sisters, and Mothers. When we have thus learned to set our hearts aright, and are convinced that the duties of life are reciprocal, our enquiry will naturally be, how we may most advantageously contribute our part to encrease the mass of human happiness.

Now it is found, that wherever any pursuit, which has the good of mankind for its object, is to be attained, the united force and ability of many, concentrated to one end, and acting at the same time upon one point, promote the purpose in a rapidly encreasing ratio, and effect infinitely more, than the same persons could, with equally good intentions, individually execute. With such views, the ingenuity of Men, in very early ages of the world, discovered the propriety of union, agreement, and mutual good understanding, for promoting the common welfare.

They associated into bodies of various forms, as defence, attack, security, or the advancement of knowledge, were respectively
their

their objects. Such united bands naturally led to the love of Order, that corner-stone of all establishments which can hope to be lasting. An individual may indeed run his short course upon the earth, careless of the present, regardless of the future ; if he meet in his irregular career, others as eccentric as himself, acting from no regular, permanent principle, he will succeed in throwing all into wild confusion : but if he form one link only of a strong and united chain, the reaction of the others will forcibly check, and restore him to his proper place. To give value therefore to Society, or even to continue its existence, Order must be sought : that principle on which the World was first founded, and on which all, who endeavour to follow the world's Creator and it's God, must proceed.

It does not mean that every one should act exactly the same part as others, or join in dull, unprofitable UNISON, but that the views of all should combine in one great whole, and thus form the celestial music so aptly called, the Harmony, the universal HARMONY. In Heaven itself, the seat and fountain of perfection, that Circle whose property it is to be complete, and incapable of improvement, the blessed Inhabitants have their several offices, and

move,

move in their appointed spheres ; and as we can only approach perfection so far as we have powers, energy, and purity to imitate the God of Heaven, so no family, no society, can benefit themselves or others but in proportion as every member is led to act up to his station ; and carefully fulfil the task especially appointed him to do.

Thus does that vast machine, stupendous effort of human skill, thus does the gallant ship, whose magnitude is limited only by the capacity of the ports destined to receive her, float securely through the widest, or most tempestuous ocean. Crowd her with the most zealous hands, yet if they be unskilful, confusion will take the Helm, and inevitable will be the universal destruction. Place her under the direction but of a few, who know their several duties, to which in the calm or in the storm they are equally attached, from which no temporary madness can seduce them, and safely may you trust your hopes and fortunes there.

If this allusion holds good with regard to every Society founded on Reason, and designed with Wisdom, more especially, we trust, will it apply to THAT, whose ceremonies have this day attracted

your

your notice. If to have stood the searching test of many ages, if to have remained, or rather encreased, and emerged with renovated strength, from the wreck of dissolving Kingdoms, if to have diffused itself wherever Science, wherever Virtue, wherever Laws and Order are known,—if this be Honour, or if this be Praise, it is surely, it is indisputably theirs.

Whatever is select and peculiar, must have some distinguishing mark to make it so : and when a removal from common eyes is intended, some impenetrable veil must be drawn before them. To discriminate a Member, from one who is not an associate, even through the most differing language, manners, or religion ; certain established criteria and signs must be appointed ; and that they have, in the present instance, been wisely fixed, the singular, yet universal existence of this Institution, with its appropriate characteristic of inviolable secrecy, fully proves. Let then strangers to its rules, repress wanton, or even apparently laudable curiosity. Though from the universality of the Order throughout the Earth, no particular form of worship is necessary to their fellowship, yet in a Christian land, if aught repugnant, or not consonant to Christianity be detected, suspicion would doubtless be justified. Now what says the Christian

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doctrine

doctrine on the conduct of Men?---“ *By their fruits ye shall know them.*”---If therefore you see, that where these Societies are found, THERE rancour, litigation, rebellion, hatred, uncharitableness, and every evil work, prevail amid themselves, and are promoted by them among their neighbours, you will need no directions how to judge them. But if on the contrary you perceive, what is well known and undeniable, that Peace, Harmony, Piety and Charity are inculcated by their INSTITUTIONS, and as far as human frailty and militating passions well permit, promoted by their ACTIONS, and always by those actions which proceed from them as a BODY, then by their fruits they are known, and for their fruits they should be honoured and respected. Assisting with unremitting fervour the great cause of genuine love and active goodwill, Masonry tends to diminish the aggregate sum of human sorrow, while it softens the hearts, and improves the morals of it's votaries:---thus doubly efficacious, thus equally blessing him that gives and that receives.

It is necessary to have felt the keen searchings of woe, and to have tasted the bitterness of distress, before the true value of a friend can be rightly appreciated. When Sorrow bows down the

Head

Head like a Bullrush, and Man feels deserted by the world ; no kind hand extended to save him from sinking---even in that saddest season, does the Genius of Benevolence break forth ; then does the sufferer descry, not ONE FRIEND, but many ; if his conduct has not rendered him an outcast from the virtuous, nor chased him from the fellowship of the good, then does he find every where those earnest to cheer his fainting spirit, and blesses the day when he became a BROTHER. When led away by youthful passions, or hurried on thoughtless into danger, his behaviour betrays imprudent rashness, defying the world, as if no eye could see, no tongue dare to rebuke him, he is at least warned of his folly ;---Monitors rise around him, he meets every where Guardians and disinterested Friends, who dare do much, armed with such peculiar authority, in so good a cause ; who, if the voice of gentle admonition fail, have methods to reclaim the wanderer, which those not totally lost to decent pride or honest shame, will not chuse to resist.

What can we reason, our great ethic Poet enquires, but from what we know ?---To assist us to form proper ideas on the present occasion, let us extract a single clause, from among many of like tendency, from their published Institutes :---

“ In

“ In the State, you are to be a quiet and peaceable Subject, true to your Sovereign, and just to your Country ; you are not to countenance disloyalty or rebellion, but patiently submit to legal authority, and conform with cheerfulness to the Government under which you live, yielding obedience to the laws which afford you protection, and never forgetting the attachment you owe to the spot where you first drew breath ! !”*

Are these the instructions they give their disciples !---Is this the general tenor of their avowed charges at initiation ?---Then why be anxious to know the secret ones !---They cannot be contradictory, on the principles before explained, by which all Society is cemented---an house divided against itself cannot stand. Laws which contradict each other, can never be calculated to support or pre-serve any institution whatever.

From the rules and implements of Architecture, it is well known the symbols and allusions characteristic of Masonry are taken.---But it is evident, that on the promotion of Knowledge, on inducements to study the laws of Nature, and to further the progress of

* PRESTON ON MASONRY, P. 46.

science, it's real utility will bear, and it's most general value depend. For this hath Wisdom hewn out her SEVEN PILLARS, those seven liberal Sciences so well known, and amid the many improvements of human knowledge since the days of Solomon, still so well distinguished, as the firm supports of universal learning.*

Let us hope then, that as the external part of the institution is this day employed for the purpose of erecting a Building, appropriated to the business of the Lodge, and the innocent enjoyments of Fellow-Masons, so its abstract, theoretic part, may, under the present favourable auspices, in equal degree flourish and advance. That while we admire the present solemnity, we may see in it more than an unprofitable, though fascinating spectacle. For, deeply interesting to every spectator becomes the scene, when we behold all ranks and professions assisting in the common cause of consulting the interests, watching over the morals, and wiping away the tears of Mankind.

When we see those who have the sacred trust of guarding our shores, to whose vigilance and to whose valour the executive power

* GRAMMAR, RHETORIC, LOGIC, ARITHMETIC, GEOMETRY, MUSIC, ASTRONOMY.

has happily delegated the command of our Troops, the defence of our Property, and the dearest interests of our Wives, our Children, and our Country ;* when we perceive many who are enrolled in the bands of professional or voluntary defence of our Constitution, when, I repeat, we see such Men appear as part of this day's Procession, we feel that it is countenanced by the most distinguished public spirit, that it has the protection of Virtue, and the support of Honour.

Proceed then, Sirs, proceed ye who have so well begun this auspicious work :---Let not your zeal abate, or your exertions stop, when the last stone is laid on this edifice, and solemn dedication has made it sacred to UNIVERSAL BENEVOLENCE. Remember why you reared it, keep ever in view the honourable and useful purposes for which it was erected, never let the basis of your order depart from your memory, or the rules by whose observance it has so eminently flourished, be ever remembered in vain. May you all, as INDIVIDUALS, by controuling the dangerous passions, by steadily observing the engagements to which you have devoted

* Since the above was delivered, the County of Sussex regrets that Major-General HURSE has been called away to another command,

yourself,

yourselves, be enabled to support the venerable and respected character, by which, as a Body, you are so worthily distinguished.

So, when you are gathered to your kindred dust, shall your memory be handed down in pious praise to your descendants, and successive Brethren : so while the infant structure of this day continues to rear it's mystic head, and long, very long, may the date of it's existence and it's honour be protracted, it shall rejoice those who are sinking into the peaceful Grave, to leave it filled with zealous Members of the order, continuing anxious to transmit it's benefits to their posterity ; and they shall exult in the hope that their Prayer will be heard, when they say of Masonry what the expiring Patriot* once said of his Country, " ESTO PERPETUA !"
---*Amen.*

* FATHER PAUL.

A N T H E M S,

AN THEMES,

Performed at laying the FOUNDATION STONE of FREE-

MASON'S HALL, in LEWES, April 19, 1797.

AN THEM I.

BY Masons' Art th' aspiring dome
On stately columns shall arise,
All climates are their native home,
Their godlike actions reach the skies.
Heroes and kings revere their name,
While poets sing their lasting fame.

Great, noble, generous, good, and brave;
All virtues they must justly claim;
Their deeds shall live beyond the grave,
And those unborn their praise proclaim.
Time shall their glorious acts enrol,
While love and friendship charm the soul.

AN THEM II.

TO Heaven's high Architect all praise,
All praise, all gratitude be given;
Who design'd the human soul to raise,
By mystic secrets sprung from Heaven.

С Н О Р У S.

Sound aloud the great JЕHOVAH's praise;
To him the dome, the temple raise.

AN THEM III.

"LET there be light!"—the Almighty spoke,
Refulgent streams from chaos broke,
To illumine the rising earth!
Well pleas'd the Great Jehovah stood—
The Power Supreme pronounc'd it good,
And gave the planets birth!
In choral numbers Masons join,
To blest and praise this light divine.

Parent of light! accept our praise!
Who shedd'st on us—thy brightest rays,
The light that fills his mind—
By choice selected, lo! we stand,
By friendship join'd, a social band!
That love—that aid mankind!
In choral numbers, &c.

The widow's tear—the orphan's cry—
All wants—our ready hands supply,
As far as power is given!
The naked clothe—the pris'ner free—
These are thy works, sweet CHARITY!
Reveal'd to us from Heaven!
In choral numbers, &c.

AN THEM IV.

GRANT us, kind Heaven! what we
request,
In Masonry let us be blest;
Direct us to that happy place
Where friendship smiles in every face:
Where Freedom and sweet Innocence
Enlarge the mind and cheer the sense.

Where scepter'd Reason, from her throne,
Surveys the Lodge, and makes us one;
And Harmony's delightful sway
For ever sheds ambrosial day:

Where we blest Eden's pleasures taste,
While balmy joys are our repast.

No prying eye can view us here;
No fool or knave disturb our cheer;
Our well-form'd laws set mankind free,
And give relief to misery:

The poor, oppress'd with woe and grief,
Gain from our bounteous hands relief.

Our Lodge the social Virtues grace,
And Wisdom's rules we fondly trace;
Whole Nature open to our view,
Points out the paths we should pursue,
Let us subsist in lasting peace,
And may our happiness increase!